



FOOD & NUTRITION SERVICES

March 24, 2026

Selling À la carte Items

Smart Snacks sold at school during the school day must meet Smart Snack nutrition standards. This includes nutrition standards for ALL ala carte foods. Selling a` la carte foods is a best practice to help the non-profit school food service account generate revenue. Smart Snack requirements apply to all food and beverages sold during the school day, this includes fundraisers, snack bars, coffee stands, and all concessions available for sale to students during the school day. Guidance can be found on the [Smart Snacks page](#). Program Operators are required to operate the program according to federal regulations. An LEA operating the Program must not intentionally purchase and sell food and beverage items that do not meet Smart Snack requirements.

The non-profit food service account must not be used to purchase a` la carte/smart snack items that are not compliant. This is an unallowable cost of the non-profit school food service account. Per 2 CFR Part 200, 7 CFR 210.19 and 220. Financial impacts must be reimbursed by the General fund for unallowable cost from the non-profit school food service account.

USDA does not have any restrictions on when a Smart Snack compliant competitive food may be sold during the school day if the food sold is Smart Snack compliant. [USDA Smart Snack final rule](#) is found here.

To ensure the item you are selling is Smart Snack compliant, you may utilize the [Smart Snack Calculator](#).

Schools may use the Local Wellness Policy to place restrictions on some additional information and specify more restrictive standards of food and beverages sold at school.

Missouri Farm to School

"Harvest of the Season" Contest

The Missouri Farm to School team is excited to promote our monthly "Harvest of the Season" contest. Awards are being made for local foods served in school meals from January-September.

As part of this contest, districts must share pictures, recipes, and stories of the local food item featured on the menu that month.



Winners will be selected each month and will be awarded a \$1,500 Farm to School mini-grant that can be used directly on allowable Farm to School expenses listed in the application.

On the following link you will find additional information and can also **submit a contest application** for local harvests served in the month of March. **Deadline to submit an application for the month of March is March 31!** Applications will need to be entered monthly for the contest.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Madelyn Terry (Madelyn.terry@dese.mo.gov), Sierra Walsh (sierra.walsh@dese.mo.gov), or Barbara Shaw (Barbara.shaw@dese.mo.gov).

Incorporating Local Beef into Child Nutrition Programs

USDA Food and Nutrition Service is pleased to share the **SP 03-2026, CACFP 02-2026, SFSP 02-2026, Incorporating Local Beef into Child Nutrition Program Meals** memorandum. This memorandum provides helpful resources and strategies for Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operators and ranchers to incorporate local beef into school meals. Resource topics cover procurement, funding resources, food safety, crediting, and technical assistance contacts from the Farm to School Program.

This memorandum is in support of Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins' commitment to American beef and the recently published **USDA Plan to Fortify the American Beef Industry**.

Local Farm and Food Advocacy Day

Barbara Shaw, Coordinator and Sierra Walsh, Lead Nutrition Program Analyst represented DESE FNS at the Local Farm and Food Advocacy Day on February 12th where nearly 100 farmers and food system advocates came together. Barbara and Sierra shared the successes of farm to school projects across our state, as well as identified areas of improvement in developing sustainable farm to school partnerships with fellow attendees.



Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025

Effective Immediately

Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

On January 14, 2026, President Donald J. Trump signed into law the **Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025**. This law amends Section 9(a)(2)(A) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (**42 U.S.C. 1758(a)(2)(A)**) revising requirements for milk provided through the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP).



USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has issued a memorandum to Child Nutrition Program Regional Office and State Agency Directors: SP 01-2026 "Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program." This memorandum and its attachment provide guidance on implementation of the updated fluid milk requirements for school lunch as required by the new law. This amendment to the statute applies **only to the NSLP- the amendment does not apply to breakfast.**

Review the **USDA Memo SP 01-2026**:

- Allows schools to offer whole and 2% milk at lunch only
- Removes saturated fat from the weekly average calculation for lunch only
- Allows Parents and Legal Guardians to provide a written request for milk modifications for students with disabilities

Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act Q&A

1.) Question 1: Does this new bill apply to **Smart Snacks** and the **NSLP Afterschool Snack Program**?

- **Response 1:** No. As indicated by changes made by the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act and SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program, these changes apply only to K-12 lunches served under the National School Lunch Program including the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of NSLP.

2.) Question 2: Does this apply to the School Breakfast Program (SBP)? And if not, how are schools supposed to handle accommodating a child for a disability at lunch but not breakfast?

- **Response 2:** No. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act and SP 01-2026 applies only to K-12 lunches served under the National School Lunch Program. Therefore, schools operating the School Breakfast Program must continue to obtain a written statement from an authorized medical professional including registered dietitians. This written statement is required at school breakfast to provide a fluid milk substitute for a disability that cannot be met with a nutritionally equivalent, non-dairy, fluid milk substitute. Memoranda associated with reasonable accommodations are linked below for convenience.

3.) Question 3: If a parent can now request a fluid milk substitute for a disability, what if they request an energy drink (like Red Bull) or juice? Is that allowable?

- **Response 3:** Under the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, a parent or guardian may provide a written statement requesting a reasonable accommodation for a fluid milk substitute for a student with a disability. This statement must follow the same core principles as one provided by a medical professional that identifies the student's impairment and explains how it restricts their diet. The school must accommodate the disability, however, they are not required to provide a specific item, such as a particular non-dairy beverage or juice, if it creates an undue burden. Program operators can use their discretion.

4.) Question 4: If a parent requests (due to disability) for the school to serve juice instead of milk, can the school accommodate that without a medical statement?

- **See Response #3**

If you have questions, please reach out to your regional Nutrition Program Specialist ([Map](#)).

FNS Resources, Information & Updates

School Lunch Hero Day 2026

Celebrate School Lunch Hero Day (SLHD) on May 1, 2026 and recognize the efforts your team shows everyday to provide healthy meals to students! [Learn more about SLHD](#) or checkout [ways to celebrate SLHD](#). This annual observance is a chance to showcase what a difference school nutrition professionals make in the lives of every child who comes through the cafeteria.

Summer SuN Bucks 2026 Info Coming Soon

Our team is actively working with the Department of Social Services (DSS) on final program details. Please be watching for future communications soon!

2025-2026 Prospective Waiver

Using authority under Section 12(l) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA), 42 U.S.C 1760(l), MO DESE was approved for a **SY25-26 prospective waiver** to

allow local program operators to quickly respond to unanticipated building closures by providing flexibilities for non-congregate meal service, meal service times, parent/guardian pick up, offer versus serve (NSLP only), meal service at school sites (SSO). With these waivers in place, DESE may approve program operators to serve non-congregate meals for up to 10 consecutive operating days without prior notice to FNS. Oftentimes, operators experience a short-term disaster/emergency. Examples are flooding, broken pipes, gas leaks, blizzards, school lockdowns for various reasons, building closures, loss of electricity resulting in building closure. All these situations happen very quickly. Without the Prospective waiver you run the risk of not being able to get waiver approval in time to provide the operator the ability to serve and claim meals and they may miss out on reimbursement.

Chef and New Food Service Staff Member Surveys

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-Food and Nutrition Services (DESE-FNS) is surveying Chefs and New Food Service Staff Members in order to learn from their expertise and identify what training resources would be of benefit to them. If applicable, please complete one of the surveys below at your earliest convenience.

- [Survey for New Food Service Staff Members](#)
- [Survey for School Chefs Survey](#)

Thank you for taking the time to help us serve you better.

Added Sugar Requirements Question

- **Question:** For the new product based added sugar requirements for cereal, do oatmeal and breakfast bars meet the definition of cereal, therefore needing to meet the added sugar requirement?

Clarification/Guidance

- **Breakfast Bars and Added Sugars-** The regulations at 7 CFR 210.10(c)(2)(iv)(C) points to breakfast cereals individually. However, if breakfast cereal is added to another product or as an ingredient in a recipe, **that breakfast cereal must still meet the product-based added sugar limit.** The product-based added sugar limit would not apply to the entire recipe, only the breakfast cereal. By SY 2027-28, the recipe will be subject to the weekly dietary specification limiting added sugars to less than 10% of calories averaged over the week in the school lunch and breakfast programs.
- This guidance also applies to yogurt used in recipes.
- **Resources:** [Exhibit A: Grain Requirements For Child Nutrition Programs; 7 CFR 210.10\(c\)\(2\)\(iii\)\(B\); Updates to School Nutrition Standards- Added Sugars](#)
- **Does oatmeal meet the requirement?**
 - Breakfast cereals include ready-to-eat, instant, and hot cereals, including oatmeal and granola. These foods are included in the product-based limits for added sugars. These product types are found in the [Exhibit A: Grain Requirements For Child Nutrition Programs](#) in groups H and I, respectively.

Upcoming Let's Talk Spring Trainings

March 24 - Afterschool Snack and Special Milk Program

April 7 - Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Overview

You can find our past Let's Talk webinars on our [Trainings page](#).



Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Reminders

The **Final Rule** published on September 26, 2023, lowered the minimum identified student percentage required to elect CEP from 40% to 25%. This creates a greater flexibility to offer no-cost meals to all enrolled students if financially viable to the school district.

LEAs interested in electing Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for some or all schools must prepare data on the number of identified students eligible for free meals based on Direct Certification (including Homeless, Foster, and Extended Eligible) and enrollment data as of April 1 to determine eligibility and participate in CEP.

Schools should make these following considerations:

- CEP does remove administrative burdens such as distributing and approving free or reduced-price applications, verifying applications, collecting lunch money from students and counting meals by eligibility
- If the ISP does not yield 100 percent free claiming percentage then it is very essential to ensure financial viability to cover the difference in meals not able to be claimed at the free rate
- FRL percentages used for formula calculation
- LEAs should use the **CEP calculator** tool to determine the financial impact

Contact Food and Nutrition Services by phone or email:

Main Phone: 573-751-8673

Email: foodandnutritionservices@dese.mo.gov

New Award Opportunity - MoCAN

Missouri School Champion Award

The Missouri Council for Activity & Nutrition (MoCAN) has created the new Missouri School Champion Award. This award will

celebrate schools and educators who go above and beyond to support student and staff wellness!

Schools should apply if they have impactful initiatives regarding nutrition, physical activity, or school wellness.

To apply, scan the QR code and nominate your school champion by May 31, 2026.



MISSOURI SCHOOL CHAMPION AWARD

Celebrating schools and educators who go above and beyond to support student and staff wellness!



Scan the QR code and nominate your school champion by May 31st!

Who should be nominated?

- ✓ Schools, districts, or school teams
- ✓ Teachers, administrators, nurses, counselors, or wellness leaders
- ✓ Anyone creating innovative or impactful nutrition and physical activity initiatives

Why nominate a school champion?

- ✓ Gain statewide recognition for your work
- ✓ Share your success as a model for other Missouri schools
- ✓ Highlight the impact you're making on student and staff health
- ✓ Celebrate your team and strengthen your wellness culture



Show Me the Veggies! - Hollister R-V Shout Out

I wanted to share some exciting developments from my recent Administrative Review at Hollister R-V, particularly with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) at Hollister Early Childhood Center. I was genuinely amazed to see portabella mushrooms being offered as a vegetable option! This is not the norm for the program, which typically features common fruits and vegetables.

Food Service Director, Dusty Woods, assigned Terri McDowell to manage the FFVP, and she has truly taken the initiative. Terri was not satisfied with serving the same veggies and fruits that the students receive in their lunch line, so she approached Dusty about exploring unique options. Together, they collaborated with Springfield Grocers to implement a plan for serving more diverse fruits and vegetables.

The outcome has been fantastic! The children were genuinely excited to try what Terri lovingly referred to as "fancy" mushrooms. Dusty did acknowledge that sourcing these unique items requires more effort and planning, but he feels it's more than worthwhile when he sees the students' enthusiasm for trying something new.

It's inspiring to see how a little creativity can significantly enhance the programs.

- Abbie Scott, Nutrition Program Specialist - Southwest Central Region



USDA Foods Update

USDA FOODS
DELIVERIES & ADVERTISTMENTS

Last day to advertise:
March 27

All remaining inventory
ships in **April**

Gold Star Live Inventory End-of-Year Deliveries

As a friendly reminder, all Direct Delivery and Fee For Service foods that have been processed for the 25/26 school year, must be received during the 25/26 school year. **Any items that were on your packet through February will be automatically shipped in March. April is our last scheduled warehouse delivery month, so product remaining in your Gold Star account will automatically be shipped to you in April.** Please plan your March and April deliveries to ensure you will be able to accept all items you have left in your inventory.

Advertising Direct Delivery Foods

School districts that have Direct Delivery items that they would like to advertise to others as bonus may do so through **March 27th**. School districts will not be allowed to post advertisements after this time so that Gold Star is able to deliver these items in April. All districts will be responsible for accepting foods that remain in their accounts at that time.

Any advertised items that are not taken by March 30th will be the responsibility of the advertising district.

Bonus Advertisements Update

You may notice that the bonus advertisements look a little different. If there is no inventory left, the Request button is no longer available. If there are still cases available, then the Request button will be available. This is a fix that helps us make sure that you will get advertisements that you request and that districts don't accidentally give up more cases of product than they intended.



26/27 USDA Foods Packet

USDA Foods Packets were completed on the Gold Star website. Packets were due March 9. To review what you put on your packet, log into the Gold Star website, and click on the green "Review: USDA Foods Survey 2026-2027."



After you click to review, there is a Download button that that will let you download a pdf of your packet.

Please be aware that there will be a delivery fee for Direct Delivery and Fee For Service items. In SY 2026-27 For public schools, the fee will be \$2.30. As always, non-public LEAs will pay the entire delivery fee charged by Gold Star Foods. We have requested state reallocation funds to help cover the costs, but we will not know if or how much funding we will receive until early fall, so please plan on paying delivery fees.

Commodities Expo Certificates

Thank you to all those who attended our commodities expos this year! Certificates were emailed to those who were in attendance. If you did not receive your certificate, please reach out to us at donatedfoods@dese.mo.gov.

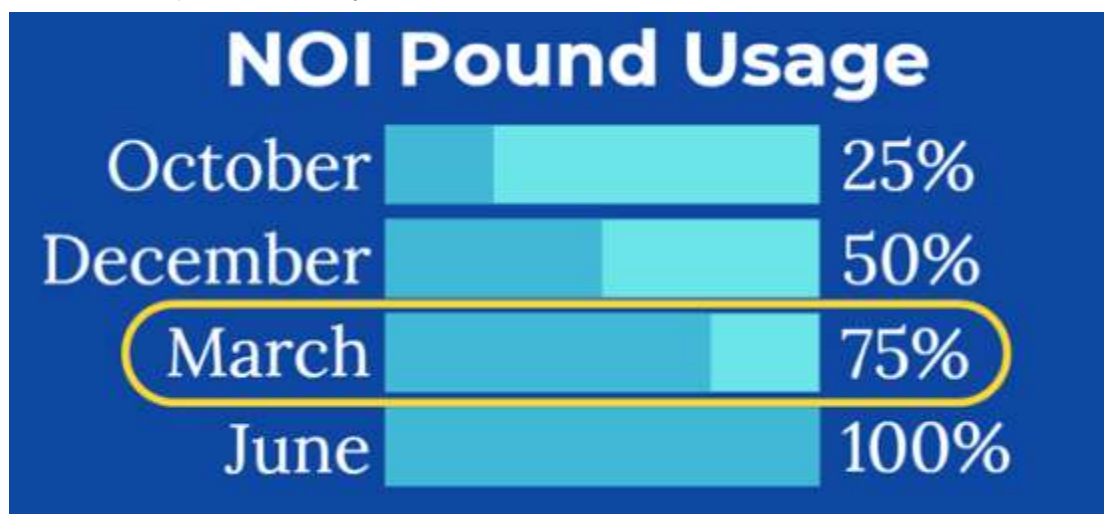
School Year (SY) 2026-27 Entitlement

Entitlement for the 26-27 school year is based on the per meal rate provided by USDA, and the "Total Lunches Served" for SY 24-25, and carryover or deficit from previous school years. Taking the USDA per meal rate and slight deficit from the previous, for Missouri, the effective per meal rate is \$0.4425. Because meal counts have decreased, overall entitlement for Missouri has decreased slightly from SY25-26 to SY 26-27. As you begin to consider processing options for next year, please place entitlement dollars where they will be most impactful to your students and your program. Do not depend on Bonus entitlement as it will be limited.

The Entitlement Estimation letter for SY 26-27 is available on the **USDA Foods** webpage under the News and Updates Header. The entitlement value is also provided on the USDA Foods Packet in the Gold Star system.

Reminder: Net Off Invoice Pound Usage

Districts that have processed Net Off Invoice (NOI) pounds should review their current balances. You should have used about 75% of your pounds by the end of March. Processors will be reaching out to districts that have unused pounds. If your district has a plan to utilize all remaining pounds, please share that with the processor. If a district does not have a plan and does not think they will be able to utilize their remaining pounds, then please notify your processors. They will move the pounds back into our State account so they can be shared with a district that can use them. For districts that have used a majority of their pounds and could utilize additional pounds, please reach out to your processors. They will be able to provide bonus pounds as they are available.



Past Newsletters

Missed a past newsletter or need to access them again? You can find them all on our Food and Nutrition Services Newsletter page!



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